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HOW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' VIEW OF THEIR PERSEVERANCE  
AFFECTS THEIR EXPERIENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED  
STATES

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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By

Jana Soto

May 2019

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**Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

\_\_\_\_\_  
MASTER'S THESIS  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Jana Soto

entitled

How International Students' View of Their Perseverance Affects Their Experience in  
Higher Education in the United States

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree  
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### Abstract

Regardless of place of origin, students entering colleges or universities undergo transition. Focusing on the added adjustments international students endure, the existing literature on these students highlights the negative effect such adaptations have. The purpose of this study was to understand the perseverance and pinpoint the strategies of international students' success in an effort to develop a strength-based approach to international student services. This research was conducted using a mixed-methods explanatory approach that began with a survey measuring international students' personal views of their perseverance, followed by phenomenological interviews. This research revealed an essence of perception of situation, self, and external support leading to perseverance. Themes revealed in this research were the ability to gain context, view of self, cultural experiences, social factors, and academic adjustment. Most participants showed a generally positive attitude toward overcoming challenges and adjusting to U.S. culture. This research can assist higher education professionals with its recommendations of developing grit, providing social support structures, creating opportunities for communal spiritual development, implementing faculty training, and instituting academic language support. With additional resources put in place that are based on structures students already use, it will lead to more success in the international student population.

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To the participants of this research: Your courage, perseverance, and faith is no small thing. Thank you for your honesty and willingness to use your voice to make a difference.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In recent years, international student enrollment has been extremely high, with over 1 million international students enrolled in universities throughout the United States (Institute of International Education, 2017). Consequently, American colleges and universities attempt to provide necessary and beneficial services to these students. However, services can prove difficult to implement effectively considering the variety of needs posed by this diverse student population.

For decades, colleges and universities have sought to assist domestic students in having a positive higher education experience. More recently, institutions have also developed services to assist international students in their success. Because the needs of international students differ from those of domestic students, most colleges and universities have separate offices, staffs, and services. For example, Tseng and Newton (2002), Lacina (2002), and Yildirim (2014) described adjustments international students face as particularly unique from the general college adjustment experienced by domestic students. These adjustments can be summed up in the following categories, created by Tseng and Newton (2002): “general living adjustment . . . academic adjustment . . . socio-cultural adjustment . . . and personal psychological adjustment” (p. 2).

Considering the differences in services needed by international students, this structure of separate services is logical; however, finding the proper services to offer has

proven a challenge for colleges and universities (Kelly & Moogan, 2012). Most services offered originate under the impression that universities must supplement for students' deficiencies. While well-intended, this structure often fails to recognize the strengths of international students. Recognizing the large scale of adjustments faced by international students proves they are strong, as exemplified by their ability and willingness to persevere (Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015).

### **Perseverance**

Upon arrival at a university in the United States, international students begin the process of acculturation. Not only must these students overcome the same adjustment into college as domestic students, they also must learn how to adjust effectively to the culture of the broader United States (Kelly & Moogan, 2012; Lacina, 2002). While undergoing all these adjustments, they are expected to continue performing well academically and socially. An initial ability to maintain enthusiasm regardless of adjustment may fade as the student progresses through the middle stages of culture shock (Kelly & Moogan, 2012).

### **Definition**

Most international student support literature focuses on students' insufficient coping and maladjustment, leaving a small facet of literature attempting to shift the general mindset (Glass et al., 2015). The literature acknowledging the strengths of international students often refers to it as resilience, the ability to recover well from setbacks (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Similarly, perseverance refers to the ability to continue bearing daily life regardless of challenges—resilience is a time of recovery,

while perseverance is a continuation (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The goal of this research was to understand international students' personal views of their perseverance.

## **Grit**

In her research on perseverance and achievement of long-term goals, psychologist Angela Duckworth coined the concept of *grit*. Her definition of “grit is the tendency to sustain interest in an effort toward very long-term goals” (Duckworth, 2018b, para. 1). Duckworth paired perseverance with passion as the two key ingredients that, when combined and implemented together, lead to the achievement of long-term goals.

Perseverance and passion are each divided into what Duckworth described as four “paragons of grit” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 91). The prior paragons—interest and purpose—describe passion. Interest refers to the genuine enjoyment of what one works to accomplish; purpose refers to the recognition that the work being done is beneficial and matters in a bigger picture. The latter paragons—practice and hope—describe perseverance. Practice refers to “[resisting] complacency” (Duckworth, 2016, p. 91), or the gradual improvement of one’s ongoing work; hope complements the previously mentioned definition of resilience, an ability to continuously recover from setbacks.

## **Purpose of the Research**

The following question guided this research: How does international students’ view of their perseverance affect their experience in higher education in the United States? Student passion and perseverance was explored in relation to their experiences at universities in the United States. Specifically, grit scores were measured to determine what types of services prove most beneficial to these students’ experiences. As international student enrollment numbers continue to grow, student service professionals

are tasked with the challenge of providing accurate services. This research seeks to understand the grit of international students and how it effects their experiences. The current study seeks to learn the motivations international students use to overcome their adjustment, recognize their strengths, and present ideas for developing services.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

In the past 20 years, international student enrollment has more than doubled, forming the large population currently studying in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2017; Kelly & Moogan, 2012; Tseng & Newton, 2002). This steep increase has created a sense of urgency for U.S. colleges and universities to provide students with proper assistance and services. Glass and colleagues (2015) explained the reckless recruitment efforts put forth by some U.S. universities lacking regard for the effects of enrolling high numbers of international students. These researchers highlighted the detriment of lacking proper student services for both international and domestic students. According to Kelly and Moogan (2012), “As global mobility increases, the diversity of learners (cultural background, language, age, experience, country domicile) presents challenges to the learner, educator and higher education institution” (p. 25). The main focus of much of the research done on international students is weaknesses and stressors. According to Smith and Khawaja (2011), “The majority of coping research on international students focuses upon maladaptive coping” (p. 705). Rudmin (2008) agreed that “research on acculturation has been misdirected . . . in an era of negative stereotypes” (p. 110). The literature reviewed below seeks to understand the adjustments international students in the United States endure and what allows their continued success regardless of both institutional and personal setbacks.

## **Defining Acculturation**

A variety of terms are used to describe international students' adjustment processes after arriving in the United States. This section describes the terms relevant to this research, explains the differences in the literature, and clarifies the definitions for how they are used in the current study.

Tseng and Newton (2002) spoke of “adjustment problems” (p. 1) and “international student adjustment” (p. 2). Kelly and Moogan (2012) described “culture shock,” Burnard (2005) used “student adaptation” (p. 177), Yildirim (2014) wrote about the “adjustment process” (p. 1), Kagan and Cohen (1990) used “cultural adjustment” (p. 133), and Lin (2012) described “students’ challenges” (p. 333). With a wide variety of terms, research is difficult to classify and connect with other sources.

Most researchers, however, prefer to use the term *acculturation* regardless of their acknowledgement of differences in meanings with similar terms. While each definition of acculturation varies slightly, the most common definitions feature the gradual taking on of “behaviors” (Rudmin, 2008, p. 109; Zhang & Dixon, 2003, p. 208) and “practices” (Kim, 2003, p. 382) of the host culture. The term *acculturation* used in this research refers to the non-native students gradually understanding cultural characteristics of the host culture (Kim, 2003; Rudmin, 2008; Zhang & Dixon, 2003).

## **International Student Adjustment**

The following adjustment factors are based mainly on Tseng and Newton's (2002) four categories of “adjustment problems faced by international students” (p. 1)—the content of which is emphasized by other researchers (Furnham, 1988 as cited in Burnard, 2005; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Lacina, 2002; Yildirim, 2014):



- “General living adjustment” (Tseng & Newton, 2002, p. 2): adjustment of diet, comfortability of living conditions, adaptation to environment/climate, navigating insurance/financial stress, understanding public transportation or requirements to obtain personal transportation
- “Academic adjustment” (Tseng & Newton, 2002, p. 2): language difficulties/lack of academic English, understanding the education system structure, differing learning styles and classroom structure, heavier or lighter workload, complicated learning materials
- “Socio-cultural adjustment” (Tseng & Newton, 2002, p. 2): culture shock/fatigue, discrimination, learning cultural norms and customs, understanding interpersonal relationships, handling conflicts, interpreting differing worldviews, understanding social systems, navigating misinterpretations
- “Personal psychological adjustment” (Tseng & Newton, 2002, p. 2): emotional support, “homesickness, loneliness, depression, frustration or feeling alienation, isolation, the loss of status or identity, and feelings of worthlessness” (p. 591).

Abarbanel (2009) stated, “Crossing and integrating cultures is a process, and like breathing, not a single event” (p. 135)—the adjustment of international students is evidenced by its drawn-out stages that have no definite time constraint. Regardless of these difficult adjustments, Mamiseishvili (2012) stated, “The drive to succeed helps them persevere and overcome these challenges to achieve their goals” (p. 13). The drive to succeed is of primary focus of this research and is further explored later in the review of the literature.

**Culture shock.** As shown above, international students have a number of adjustments to navigate. As they adapt to the host culture, they go through stages of emotional distress that have typically been labeled “culture shock” (Kelly & Moogan, 2012, p. 24). While some disagreement exists concerning the language used and whether the term *shock* is an appropriate descriptor (Abarbanel, 2009), the literature agrees this time of adjustment is defined by “intense emotions” (p. 136), a “disorienting experience” (Bochner, 1982, p. 162), and even “a buzzing confusion” (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001, p. 267).

The stages of culture shock vary. Meintel (1973) argued culture shock “is said to be undergone by all who enter a foreign culture, whether or not they are aware” (p. 48). Meintel’s view emphasized the benefit of personal growth resulting from the adjustment involved in cross-cultural assimilation. Glass and colleagues (2015) agreed students “viewed such hardship as something that also enriched their lives, increased their resourcefulness, and prepared them to deal with new challenges” (p. 85). While not minimizing the discomfort connected with cultural assimilation, these views express the benefits of cultural assimilation rather than the downfalls emphasized by most research.

**Stages of culture shock.** The literature does not conclude to a general consensus concerning the initial experience entering into a new culture—some sources describe a positive experience (Bochner, 1982; Brown & Holloway, 2008), while others describe it negatively (Bochner, 1982; Furnham, 2012). After the first stage, the literature tends to agree that the experience is overwhelmingly negative, using descriptions such as “frustration, depression, and confusion” (Bochner, 1982, p. 163), “rejection . . . surprise, anxiety, even disgust and indignation” (p. 167), “chauvinism” and “marginal” (Furnham,

2012, p. 2), and “loneliness, estrangement, sadness, hostility, homesickness, physical illness” (Brown & Holloway, 2008, p. 34). After wrestling through such difficulties, the latter experience of culture shock includes “adaptation” (Brown & Holloway, 2008, p. 34), “mediating” (Furnham, 2012, p. 10), and even as much as “confidence and satisfaction” (Bochner, 1982, p. 163). Multiple factors assist international students in overcoming the negative experiences of culture shock, both internally and externally. Most literature agrees the combination of internal and external factors individuals use through culture shock is the most common approach to overcoming negative experiences.

### **Student Friendship Networks**

The literature concerning the coping process of international students maintains a theme of friendship networks. The importance of social support in the perseverance of international students is reinforced by a number of researchers (Andrade, 2005; Bochner, 1982; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Furnham, 2004/2012; Glass et al., 2015; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Glass and colleagues (2015) specified an “in-between identity” students develop “as they encounter cultural boundaries that range from generalized feelings of difference to disruptive experiences that evoke a sense of being out of place, of being an outsider and other, of being foreign” (p. 59). This type of identity is difficult to understand for domestic students, leading international students to form their most essential relationships among themselves.

Brown and Holloway (2008) explained loneliness that troubles international students and how they “tend to ease their loneliness by creating a conational friendships network” (p. 44). Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) divided international students’ friendship networks into “three distinct interpersonal networks” (p. 291) beginning with

the “primary network” (p. 291). This network consists of students from the same home country, allowing “ethnic and cultural values to be rehearsed and *expressed*” (p. 291). This is followed by a “secondary network” (p. 291) made up of both international and domestic students “to *instrumentally* facilitate the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner” (p. 291-292). Finally, a “third and much less salient network is the foreign students’ multi-cultural circle of friends and acquaintances. The main function of this network is to provide companionship for *recreational*, non-culture and non-task oriented activities” (p. 292). These networks tiers are essential considering differing definitions and expectations of friendship across cultures, and international students viewing American friendships as shallow and “[showing] less interest” (Glass et al., 2015, p. 56).

The support of friendship networks eases the adjustment many international students experience. Friendship networks are an example of external influences that assist international students in overcoming the difficulties of culture shock. The internal adjustments students undergo prove more difficult to track and therefore more difficult to consider when developing student services. Glass and colleagues (2015) described students gaining “resilience, activism, courage, and experiences that are developmentally significant in shifting the students’ perspective both on life in the United States and on themselves” (p. 5). These traits are internal adjustment factors similar to the idea of “grit,” motivation made up of passion and perseverance, which was used in this research to explore its impact on adjustment.

## Grit

In her research on success through difficult and challenging tasks, Angela Duckworth (2016) coined the term *grit*. Her results determined a “combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special. In a word, they had grit” (p. 8). Grit, in and of itself, has nothing to do with typical personality traits such as talent but is an entity that holds its own meaning and definition. Gritty people are typically more successful, hold high degrees, and accomplish tasks such as competing in the Olympics (Duckworth, 2016). Duckworth (2016) explained grit as “[having] two components: passion and perseverance” (p. 56). In reference to international students, Khawaja and Stallman (2011) agreed that

[r]esearchers indicate that previous investigations have revealed that adjustment to foreign country and a university is a challenge for international students, who may subsequently experience distress. Nevertheless many international students have been resilient and have managed the difficulties and challenges effectively. (p. 10)

Bista and Foster (2011) stated, “Fortunately for North American universities, many students from foreign countries are dedicated to receiving a degree in higher education and carry out their studies in spite of the additional difficulties” (p. 1). This raises a question: How do international students’ personal views of perseverance affect their experience in higher education in the United States?

**Resilience and perseverance.** International students experience the adjustments stated above in addition to typical adjustments felt by domestic students (Furnham, 2004; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Yet regardless of these difficult factors, “retention and

graduation rates for international students are comparable of those to American students” (Andrade, 2005, p. 103). Duckworth (2016) might interpret this as grit; whereas, Glass and colleagues (2015) might describe this as resilience.

In their research on international students studying in the United States Glass and colleagues (2015) suggested “three subtle but important ways that international educators and administrators might enlarge [their] approach to the issue of belonging when it comes to the international student population at U.S. colleges and universities” (p. 84). Their first suggestion provided a focus for this research: shifting the mindset toward international students from “vulnerabilities” and to a “focus on their resilience and strength” (p. 84). According to Truebridge (2014),

Resilience is a process—not a trait. It is the dynamic and negotiated process within individuals (internal) and between individuals and their environments (external) for the resources and supports to adapt and define themselves as healthy amid adversity, threat, trauma, and/or everyday stress. (p. 15)

Having high levels of grit represents more than simply talent or intelligence. The combination of passion and perseverance allows people to endure the challenges and break through barriers to achieve the goals they have set for themselves (Duckworth, 2016). Just as Truebridge (2014) stated that this mindset is a process, Duckworth (2016) agreed that “grit grows” (p. 79). Duckworth (2016) discovered “we adapt in response to the growing demands of our circumstances. Eventually, new ways of thinking and acting become habitual” (p. 89)—similar to the latter stages of culture shock described above.

Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, and Deci (2004) researched intrinsic versus extrinsic goal pursuit. They found “both intrinsic goals and autonomy support

produced more free-choice persistence . . . finding in that measurement of persistence included behaviors that required substantial additional time and effort” (p. 258). While their study also covered learning and performance, they concluded “what makes persistence different from learning and performance (for which there were interactions) is that persistence involved doing additional work” (p. 258). The present study argues that this “additional work” is the adjustment of international students to a foreign culture, while also dealing with general college adjustments.

**Passion.** According to Vallerand and colleagues (2003), passion is “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (p. 757). They went on to divide passion into two types: harmonious passion and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion “is in harmony with other aspects of the person’s life” (p. 757); the individual is self-motivated and voluntarily chooses to engage in the activity of his or her passions. Obsessive passion “originates from intrapersonal and/or interpersonal pressure either because certain contingencies are attached to the activity such as feelings of social acceptance of self-esteem, or because the sense of excitement derived from activity engagement becomes uncontrollable” (p. 757). With obsessive passion, engaging in the passionate activity is compulsive and out of the individual’s control; it “causes conflict with other activities in the person’s life” (p. 757). Vallerand and colleagues argued that the type of passion an individual has changes the way they persist through their task—determining whether the passionate individuals have a positive or negative experience.

Stoeber, Childs, Hayward, and Feast (2011) furthered the research of Vallerand et al. (2003) by researching the two types of passion effecting burnout in students. They

found that harmonious passion creates “higher academic engagement and lower academic burnout in university students” (p. 512); surprisingly, both harmonious and obsessive passion showed positive relationships with “vigor” (p. 513) and negative relationships with “inefficacy” (p. 513). Duckworth (2016) suggested that “enthusiasm is common. Endurance is rare” (p. 58). She explained enthusiasm as a metaphorical firework that merely explodes then fizzles—it is pretty to look at and exciting in the moment, and the results were easy to obtain. However, she explained that a firework is not passion because passion is long-term.

Just as Vallerand et al. (2003) explained passion developing an activity into a large portion of one’s life, Duckworth (2016) defined passion as “commitment of a different kind. Rather than intensity, what comes up again and again in [interviews] is the idea of *consistency over time*” (p. 57). By the definition from Vallerand and colleagues, Duckworth’s idea of passion is somewhat of a combination of harmonious passion and obsessive passion with importance held on harmonious. These authors agree that persistence and passion correlate.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

While research on topics concerning international students is abundant, it is concentrated into common topics such as adjustment factors, social support, and culture shock. However, the literature rarely views international students through a lens of strength. Furthermore, the research approach changes when one acknowledges that the formal definition of resilience refers to a recovery from a difficult situation and that perseverance focuses on the act of doing a difficult task regardless of setbacks (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). For those reasons, the literature lacks evidence of the level of



perseverance and passion of international students. This research sought to answer the following question: How do international students' views of their perseverance affect their experience in higher education in the United States?

### **Essence of Research**

As stated above, U.S. higher education institutions feel pressure to establish proper support services for international students. The rapid increase in enrollment numbers in recent decades has left large gaps in services. Common research topics have created compartmentalized support perspectives leading to a lack of services such as immigration assistance and an abundance of services such as peer support groups. This research sought to understand students' perspective of their perseverance to determine support services offering the greatest benefit.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Design**

This research was conducted using a mixed method, explanatory approach combining quantitative and qualitative designs. In particular, a survey was administered to measure the passion and perseverance levels of international students studying at a university in the United States. Following the survey, a portion of voluntary participants were selected for interviews to understand their personal view of passion and perseverance. Through this process, the understanding of passion and perseverance levels of international students was used to better comprehend international students' experiences at higher education institutions in the United States.

According to Creswell (2007), an explanatory approach is “sequentially in two phases, with one form of data collection following and informing the other” (p. 542). This method began quantitatively to collect general data and then followed qualitatively “to refine, extend, or explain” (Creswell, 2007, p. 542). These results were not combined but rather analyzed separately—for this research, the survey measuring passion and perseverance levels helped develop items to explore in the interviews to understand the shared experiences of the participants.

## **Context and Participants**

This research was conducted at a small, faith-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwestern United States that enrolled over 100 international students from more than 40 nations during the Fall 2017 semester. This institution strives to provide a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for international students, fostering cross-cultural friendships and student services. This university was chosen because of its ratio of international students representing a range of nations and devotion to providing quality services to those students.

The students who participated must have been enrolled for a minimum of one academic semester at the institution where the research was conducted. Participants of a typical college age of 18 to 25 who represented a range of home nations were selected.

## **Procedures**

All students enrolled at this institution for at least one academic semester with an F-1 student visa status were issued the Grit Scale survey (Duckworth, 2016) during the Spring 2019 semester. The Grit Scale evaluated the combination of the passion and perseverance levels of participants to assess their abilities to achieve long-term goals regardless of difficulty.

The interviews were used to clarify the data collected from the survey and were analyzed separately. The interviews sought to understand the participants' personal definitions of passion and perseverance, how those interpretations contributed to their survey answers, and how these views affected their university experience. A sampling of four survey participants were chosen for interviews. These participants were invited to take part in follow-up interviews based on a voluntary sign-up field at the end of the

survey. The interview participants were a current freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior to understand a range of experiences.

**Grit Scale Survey.** The present study utilized a 10-point Likert-style questionnaire that participants completed individually and submitted to the researcher. Following the structure of a cross-sectional survey design, participants took the survey one time about their experiences from their time starting at the university to the present. As Creswell (2007) stated, the goal of a cross-sectional survey design is to determine “current attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or practices” (p. 377) the participants hold at the time when the research takes place.

The Grit Scale was selected because of its unique approach to success. This approach desired to explain success based on hard work and determination rather than talent and natural abilities. Duckworth (2016) explained the ability to achieve long-term goals required individuals to be “resilient and hardworking” (p. 8), as well as to “[know] in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted” (p. 8). This led to the measurement of passion and perseverance as combined factors leading to success rather than simply talent or intelligence. Permission to use the Grit Scale was granted from the Duckworth team for the purpose of this research (Duckworth team, personal communication, March 27, 2018). The Grit scale survey consists of questions asking directly about strengths and weaknesses. Data was analyzed by assigning a numerical value to each answer between “very much like me” and “not like me at all.” Questions directed toward strengths assigned a numerical value of 5 to the answer of “very much like me,” decreasing by one numerical value until the value of 1 to the answer of “not like me at all.” Questions directed toward weaknesses used the same progression of numbers in the opposite order.

**Phenomenological interviews.** Creswell (2013) described the purpose of this approach “to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 76). Therefore, the phenomenological piece of this research sought to understand the shared lived experiences of a diverse group of international students studying at a university in the United States.

Interviews were conducted based on semi-structured, open-ended questions. These interviews were analyzed separately from the data collected by the surveys. Coinciding with an explanatory approach, the results from the survey and the interviews were analyzed separately. Therefore, with the survey data analyzed, the interviews sought to explain and clarify shared experiences of international students in the U.S.

The one-on-one interviews did not only give the researcher more understanding of the participants ideas of grit but also “prompt[ed] conversation about their evolving passion and perseverance” (Duckworth, 2018a, para. 8). Although Duckworth has conducted multiple research studies using the Grit Scale (Duckworth, 2018b), a concerning limitation is participants “holding different standards by which they judge behavior by” (Duckworth, 2018a, para. 9). The goal of these interviews was to understand a common standard by which participants measured their survey responses.

### **Data Analysis**

The Grit Scale survey results were analyzed based on participants’ scores on a 5-point rating scale, and data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Following the data collected from the survey, the interviews were recorded and coded for themes. The themes documented clarified which aspects of the grit scale had the most significant impact on the students’ experience.

This research data analysis began by determining the mean Grit Scale score of participants, and the interviews following this analysis clarified why that particular score was average among an international student population. In other words, simply determining the Grit Scale scores of international students did not sufficiently explain why they received the scores they did or what contributed to their “grittiness.”

The clarifying interviews allowed the researcher to better understand the international student experience in the United States. These interviews focused on students’ perceptions of personal passion and perseverance. Moreover, the interviews asked students to reflect on experiences that may have contributed to the outcome of their Grit Scale scores. These interviews were analyzed through coding and theming to form six major themes (Creswell, 2007). Themes were validated by negative case analysis to “[provide] a realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) and clarify bias based on the researcher’s “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

### **Benefits**

Universities in the United States enrolling populations of international students recognize the expanding need for student services offered. However, as shown by the literature review above, most of the services provided are based on an American perspective of international students needing assistance because of a lack of ability to adjust and succeed. This research attempted to clarify if this approach to international student services is beneficial. Moreover, this research attempted to provide a foundation for further research about whether international student services are more beneficial when

stemming from what students lack or from recognizing previously established strengths of these students and building services around that.

## **Chapter 4**

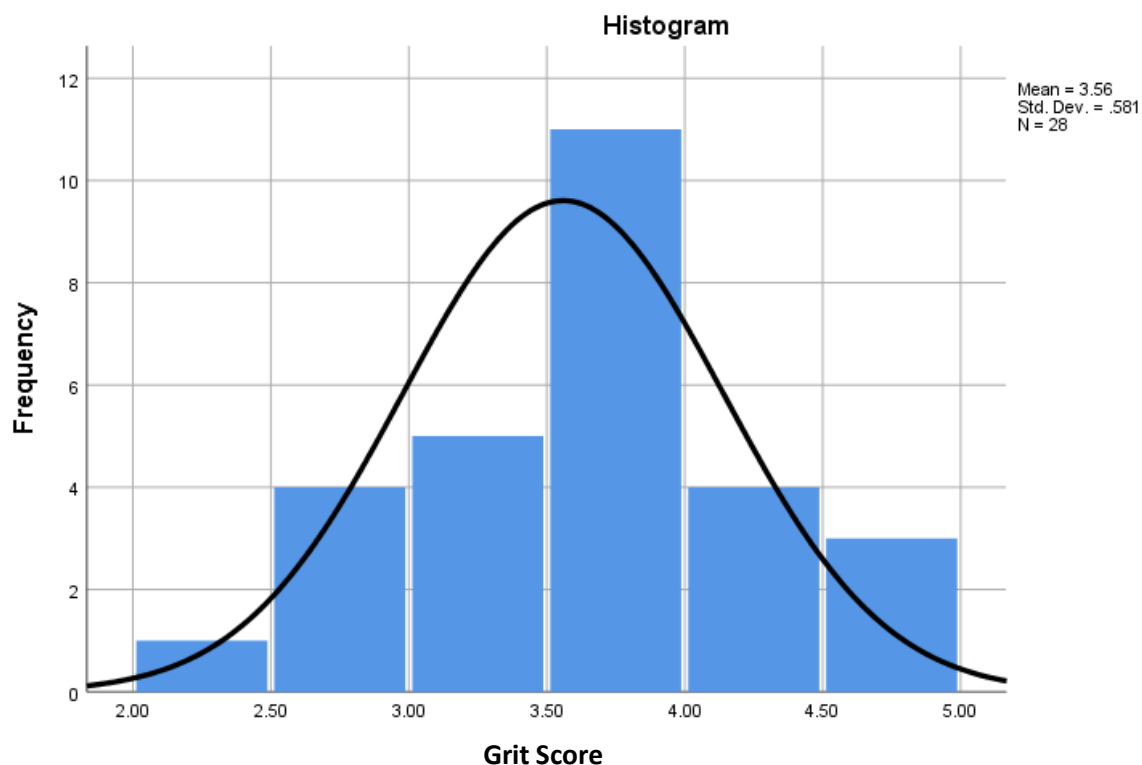
### **Results**

This study examined the experience of international students at a small, private, liberal arts, faith-based institution in the Midwest. Specifically, this study used an explanatory design to examine how international students view their abilities to persevere while studying in the United States. A survey was used to understand participants' general perception of their perseverance. Follow-up interviews were conducted to understand how this perseverance, or perception of perseverance, affects these students' experience while studying in the United States or what external implications contribute to building up self-perception of perseverance.

#### **Quantitative: Survey Results**

Survey data collection totaled 27 participants. The grit scores of these participants ranged from 2.3 to 4.6 with the average equaling 3.6. A grit score of 2.3 is in the 10th percentile of the American adult sample, while a score of 4.6 is in the 95th percentile of the American adult sample. The average score of 3.6 is in the 60th percentile. Distribution of the data is displayed in Figure 1. The standard deviation of this data is .58, showing students' perception of their perseverance is slightly higher than the average American adult. This result indicates that international students have a mindset that helps them persevere during their time studying in the United States.





*Figure 1.* Quantitative data survey results

### **Qualitative: Phenomenological Interview Results**

A total of four phenomenological interviews were conducted. These interviews were conducted with one freshman, one sophomore, one junior, and one senior. Table 1 reports the themes and sub-themes that emerged from these interviews. The major themes were the ability to gain context, one's view of self, cultural experiences, success strategies, social factors, and academic adjustment.

**Table 1***Report of Themes*

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Sub-themes</u>
Ability to gain context	Big-picture perspective Learner mindset Adaptability
View of self	Personal faith Self-awareness
Cultural experiences	No definitive sense of home Recognition of cultural differences
Success strategies	External motivation Internal drive for success
Social factors	Community focus Familial support
Academic adjustment	Informality Language difficulties

**Ability to gain context.** The first theme of *ability to gain context* contains three sub-themes: big-picture perspective, learner mindset, and adaptability. This theme refers to participants' viewpoint and response to challenges they face. Participants often described a situation from their personal viewpoint before broadening their descriptions to a greater context. This was shown especially when a focus on purpose for attending a university in the United States was applied to difficulties faced on a daily basis.

**Big-picture perspective.** In all four interviews, participants described a big-picture perspective in multiple areas. The big picture allows participants to view

circumstances under considerations beyond their own situation. Participant 4 explained, “When there are, like, a lot of setbacks and when things don’t seem to be working out or like everything is against you, just sort of know that the work is going to produce some fruit at the end.” Participant 2 echoed this mindset, while Participant 1 described a big-picture perspective in focusing on academics rather than cultural differences because academics are the reason he is in the U.S. Participant 3 exemplified a big-picture perspective through future-mindedness and open-mindedness, finding meaning in situations she does not understand.

***Learner mindset.*** All four participants demonstrated a learner mindset. When faced with challenges, they focused on what they could learn from the challenge.

Participant 4 described trying to choose a major:

The more I talked with my teachers or like my friends and family the more I figure out that maybe thinking on my feet is not . . . a characteristic that stands out in me but it’s something that I can develop.

Other participants described excitement for progressing through their classes. Participant 2 described, “I’m here, I want to learn as much as I can.” Participant 1 was the only individual who spoke about a learner mindset in relation to culture.

***Adaptability.*** Three of the four participants exemplified adaptability in their willingness to change when present circumstances deemed it necessary. Participant 2 described adapting her study habits:

I just had to go to the library at, like, 7am. I used to be a night person and then I just switched to a morning person because I had to be by myself in the library reading and I could not hear any noise so, like, those were things that changed

because I was the opposite, I would be a night person, I would study with, like, 10 groups of friends all talking at the same time.

Participant 1 described adaptability in perseverance as he spoke about staying level-headed in the midst of changes around him.

**View of self.** The second theme of *view of self* consisted of personal faith and self-awareness as sub-themes. This larger theme draws from the internal motivations of participants. View of self is how participants described their experiences based solely on their own practices, with no external persons influencing their use of this method to persevere.

**Personal faith.** All four participants spoke of personal faith multiple times during their interviews. The most mentions of personal faith were in relation to an awareness of a greater purpose for their work. When asked what prompted the participant to complete a long-term task, Participant 4 responded,

What prompted me to finish was just the fact that I'm not doing it for myself I'm doing it . . . to glorify God and, like, everything that I do is going to reflect His image, um, so if I'm doing poorly and I'm, like, I'm basically saying "I don't care about the fact that you, um, helped me get here" so it's just, yeah, I just remind myself that it is for Him and not for me that I do this.

This awareness of a greater purpose also applied to adjustment to circumstances, as shown when Participant 3 stated, "I didn't really think about 'I want to transfer' like I've never really thought that because I just know this is the place God wants me to be."

**Self-awareness.** Three participants exemplified self-awareness in their ability to recognize personal abilities and limits. When asked about working hard, Participant 1

stated, “The reason why I answered that I’m a hard worker is because I work hard and I know.” Participant 3 explained,

I’ve been learning about setting really, like, gutsy goals, as in goals that seem like it’s too much to achieve it’s like, so setting my standards high and then just knowing that it’s okay not to achieve that really high goal as long as I know I tried my best.

**Cultural experiences.** The third theme of *cultural experiences* involves participants having no definitive sense of home and their ability to recognize cultural differences. Many of the participants experienced living in or traveling to a foreign country prior to arriving in the United States. These experiences affected their adjustments and view of situations and individuals around them.

*No definitive sense of home.* When asked where they consider home, none of the four participants had a definitive answer. Three participants were raised in countries different from their countries of birth. Participant 1 stated, “To be honest, I’ve lost the sense of home so I don’t know where, um, where I’m, if I’m going back where I’m, where am I going back?” The other three participants described a sense of home in all of the places they had lived. Participant 2 stated, “I think I’ve found home in all three places, I can’t put one on top of the other.” Participant 3 echoed this sentiment:

I have different homes, as in my parents are missionaries in [country A] I’m from [country B] and I left [country B] when I was four. And I would consider [country B] my homeland, mother country, but, um, I didn’t grow up there and I’m obviously now, like, that I am more intercultural I would really consider myself different from the people that in [country B][who] grew up in [country B].

***Recognition of cultural differences.*** All four participants described cultural differences they experienced since arriving in the U.S., particularly in reference to adjusting to white American culture. Participant 1 stated,

When I first came to the States, I don't know what that, what that was but I guess people present it as white culture, um, but I didn't necessarily know that, like, I didn't necessarily experience it before so that's one of the challenges, um, I had to deal with.

Participant 3 offered the following observation:

The classes are, they're made from the perspective of, um, mostly white American professors for white American students so it's, and then a lot of the times they say "we" which pro-, which means like Americans and I have to adjust in ways that I have to think "oh okay this is from their perspective."

***Success strategies.*** The fourth theme, *success strategies*, contains the sub-themes of external motivation and internal drive for success. This theme, as well as the two themes that follow, explores the external motivations of participant perseverance. Success strategies explain how participants maintain the mindsets stated above as they work through challenges.

***External motivation.*** All four participants described some form of external motivation. Three participants mentioned maintaining scholarships as a reason for continuing to work hard, while two participants explained motivation coming from their parents' desire for them to study in the U.S.—one participant noted both maintaining a scholarship and motivation from her parents. Moreover, three participants explained the difficult process of immigration paperwork as a motivation for them to stay in the U.S.

for their studies. Participant 2 stated, “I think since I came here, like from moment one, like, leaving [the institution] would ne-, have never been an option because I know how hard it was to get here.”

***Internal drive for success.*** All four participants demonstrated an internal drive for success. Although this drive presented itself somewhat differently, a common thread was a partial individualistic mindset—this is most prevalent by all of the participants choosing their major field of study based on their own interests rather than influence from family. Three participants achieved success by setting small goals rather than long-term goals. Participant 2 stated, “For me, hard work is, um, having everything done, yes, but everything done to the best of my capability.” Participant 1 explained a different cultural perspective: “That fits really well with my culture, like the culture that I used to grow up [in], um, you know if you’re internally strong, you know, your outlook will . . . reflect this inner peace or power.”

***Social factors.*** The fifth theme, *social factors*, includes participants’ focus on community rather than their individual selves, as well as influence of familial support. Continuing in external motivations, social factors describes how participants gained social support and what role, if any, that played in their perseverance.

***Community focus.*** Two of the four participants reported that the community around them helped their success. Participant 4 described the other students in her residence hall as a reason she chose to return to the university. Participant 2 was the most community-focused participant; she described the community of other international students as a major support to her, matching the friendship network structure mentioned in the literature. She stated:

I think having a, a big community of international students and like close community helps me a lot. . . . Like having people who have gone through [challenges] who also don't have their families here, who don't have anywhere to go on a break, who have gone through situations like not speaking the language so well, hearing maybe racist comments, you know, like that definitely helps a lot because you feel like someone has been through that and can help you so I think that was really helpful in overcoming challenges.

While Participants 1 and 3 made mention of friendships in their interviews, these relationships did not prove as influential in these students' success.

***Familial support.*** All four participants mentioned familial support for their studying in the United States. However, three participants expressed difficulties brought on by living so far from their families and an inability to see them for long periods of time. These three participants' parents all live in Asia, while the participant who did not speak about distance from family is from a country much closer to the U.S. Participant 1 described compassion fatigue when hearing domestic students mention missing their families after only a few weeks. Moreover, two participants expressed strength brought on by emotional support from their families. Participant 3 explained,

It was hard to go back [to school] because I went home for the summer and, um, obviously like you don't want to go back to school and travel like such a long distance and, um, not be able to see your parents for a year.

Participant 2 stated, "I need to talk to my parents at least once a week on the phone so I can feel good."



**Academic adjustment.** The final theme, *academic adjustment*, encompassed informality—in both the classroom setting and interactions with professors—and language difficulties as sub-themes. Participants often spoke about academics during interviews, mostly in reference to their work ethic rather than adjustment. Overall, academics were viewed within a mindset of expecting difficulty within content, perhaps leading to an adjustment needed in areas other than content.

**Informality.** All four participants described adjustment to an American classroom setting as well as informal relationships with professors. One participant described feeling surprised by informal attire; two participants spoke about an adjustment to the formality or informality of the classroom compared to what they were used to. Participant 4 described the U.S. having more formal classroom settings than her country of origin: “I appreciate that here [students] are more respectful of the fact that we are in a classroom and that we should respect the classroom for what it is.” By contrast, Participant 1 described the U.S. as a less formal classroom setting.

All four participants described professors caring for them as more than only a student. Two participants described close relationships with professors outside of the classroom. Participant 2 stated, “. . . here, like, you definitely create a relationship with [professors] and I think that helps a lot because I’ve had professors like wanting to know me more than just as a student . . .” Two participants appreciated the intentionality of professors during class, even in large class settings. Participant 4 explained,

I chose to come back to [the institution] after my first semester because I just love the community and I, I really like my professors. They were very intentional, like, they really showed that they care about me and that they want me to thrive.

***Language difficulties.*** Two of the four participant expressed language difficulties during their transition. Participant 1 explained this is a result of learning British English before American English. Participant 2 described,

I thought I would not be able to study in English. Like my, my conversational English is good but it's different when you're studying like technical terms or like when I'm in a classroom and I'm hearing a different language and taking notes, like, I can't do it as fast.

Both students who expressed language difficulties were upperclassmen and, at the time of this study, felt confident in their language skills.

## **Conclusion**

International students' grit scores showed a perception of perseverance considered slightly above average. In addition, interviews revealed a combination of perception of situation, self, and external support leading to students' success within higher education in the United States. Follow-up interviews revealed themes leading to international student perseverance. By further exploring how students overcame challenges, the interviews revealed these six themes: ability to gain context, success strategies, view of self, cultural experiences, social factors, and academic adjustment. Chapter 5 discusses the survey results and each phenomenological theme, draws parallels between the present study and existing literature, and recommends best practices based on the findings stated above.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The purpose of the research was to understand the role of self-described perseverance in international students studying at a small, faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwestern United States. As stated previously, international students' grit scores show a slightly above-average perception of perseverance. Interviews revealed deeper ways in which students practice perseverance in their daily lives. The data collected from interviews revealed a combination of perception of situation, self, and external support leading to a student's success within higher education in the United States. This chapter connects the data presented previously back to the literature, offers best practices and implications for future research, and discusses this study's limitations.

### Ties to Literature

The results of this research are similar to some of the literature explored in Chapter 2. Using the existing literature and the results from this research, higher education institutions can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for international students.

**Adjustment.** The findings of this research support the adjustment factors of Tseng and Newton (2002). These factors include “general living adjustment . . . academic adjustment . . . socio-cultural adjustment . . . [and] personal psychological adjustment” (p. 2). Each participant mentioned multiple areas of these adjustment factors

during their interview. For example, Participants 1, 2, and 3 expressed at least one experience in each of these adjustment factors, while Participant 4 expressed at least one experience in three of these four adjustments. Also matching with the literature, the themes revealed in this research showed a combination of internal and external factors affecting international student experience, specifically as working through culture shock.

**Drive for success.** The sub-theme of internal drive for success proves consistent with Mamiseishvili's (2012) explanation that international students "often experience loneliness, acculturation stress, homesickness, [and] unfair treatment . . . , but the drive to succeed helps them persevere and overcome these challenges to achieve their goals" (p. 13). This was exemplified in a focus on academic success rather than cultural adjustment, specifically when Participant 1 stated, "I was focused more on, like, studying I couldn't afford time to, you know, worry about 'oh I don't,' you know, 'I don't understand the culture like why do they do the things that doesn't make sense to me.'" Moreover, Mamiseishvili's research showed students "having a future-oriented perspective and a dedication to their goals to graduate" (p.13). Bista and Foster (2011) echoed, "Many students from foreign countries are dedicated to receiving a degree in higher education and carry out their studies in spite of the additional difficulties" (p. 1). Similarly, these are consistent with this research's sub-theme of internal drive for success and also matching the big-picture perspective sub-theme.

**Social support.** The literature also maintains the subject of social support, coinciding with the theme of social factors. The most frequent mention of social support in the literature was in the form of student friendship networks (Andrade, 2005; Bochner, 1982; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Furnham, 2004/2012; Glass et al., 2015; Khawaja &

Stallman, 2011). These networks are typically structured in three tiers with a core network of students from the same home country, followed by a secondary network of like-minded international and domestic students, and an outer network of a “multi-cultural circle of friends and acquaintances” (Bochner et al., 1977, p. 292). Participant 2 was the only participant to mention specifically her closest group of friends being from the same culture, matching the core layer of student friendship networks. However, other participants mentioned social support, with both direct and indirect comments such as “when talking to friends.” Nevertheless, social support was a theme both in the literature and in the findings of this research. However, one aspect of social support not prevalent in the literature but evident in this research is familial support.

### **Implications for Practice**

The major findings in this research revealed the need for positive student mindset rather than extensive student services. Moreover, participants having past cultural experiences as well as familial support were personal traits majorly contributing to perseverance, but they cannot be replicated to assist other students. Regardless, many implications for practice can still be recommended.

**Developing grit.** In discussion about grit growing with age, Duckworth (2016) stated, “Grit grows as we figure out our life philosophy, learn to dust ourselves off after rejection and disappointment, and learn to tell the difference between low-level goals that should be abandoned quickly and higher-level that demand more tenacity” (p. 86). As stated earlier, there are four “paragons of grit” (p. 91): interest, practice, purpose, and hope. Similar to the themes found in this research, the earlier two paragons are internal

while the latter are external. Developing these traits in students advances their perseverance.

Each of the participants in this research chose their own field of study and still described interest in their field. Higher education professionals should encourage a pursuit of interest, even if that means exploration and changing majors. Asking thoughtful questions and offering attainable challenge helps assist students in exploring their interests separate from outside expectations. As interest is discovered, encouraging practice on the task by setting goals and devoting what Duckworth (2016) described as “deliberate practice” (p. 126)—effortful work that can be exhausting despite the individual’s passion—will help students maintain and grow in perseverance. Higher education professional should offer challenge and support (Sanford, 1966) by asking thought-provoking questions and helping students develop goals as they discover their interest and learn to improve their ability to work hard toward those goals.

**Spiritual development.** All four participants cited their personal faith as a major reason for their ability to persevere, yet none of them mentioned a communal faith practice such as a church service or small group—a core practice in the Christian faith. Providing international students more opportunities to practice their personal faith in a setting familiar to their culture could prove beneficial for their perseverance, faith development, and social support.

**Social support.** All four participants mentioned some form of social support assisting them. Institutions can establish structures built to assure this type of support, especially when it does not happen naturally. One such structure is familial support. Having strong family connections is helpful in the student’s success, but, according to the

interviews, distance hinders these beneficial connections. Connecting students with a domestic family that provide support, familiarity, and a welcoming environment—especially during school breaks—can help students feel more supported and, perhaps, create a small sense of home in the U.S. This structure may be particularly helpful upon first arrival in the U.S. when literature claims their experience is either very positive or very negative (Bochner, 1982; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Furnham, 2012). Moreover, students connecting with other students who understand their culture or situation was mentioned in three of the interviews. Providing access and physical space to establish such relationships can allow students to feel a sense of belonging.

**Assistance in academic adjustment.** Academic focus is at the core of international student adjustment because each student exemplified academics as their reason for coming in the United States.

**Faculty training.** The faculty at the institution where the research took place were reportedly quite student-focused, which greatly benefitted the students. Still, faculty training, specifically in how the American classroom differs from classroom structures abroad, would enhance these experiences. Specifically, training could address language difficulties and differences that students encounter, such as technical terms or terms specifically associated with respective majors. Other training would include a sensitivity to differing worldviews and pop-culture references when giving examples.

**Academic language assistance.** Many international students arrive in the U.S. fluent in conversational English or having enough English language skills to pass entry exams and attend non-ESL classes. However, the differences between academic and conversational English pose a difficulty to international students. Providing to the

broader international student community resources such as books translating field-specific terms or resources normally only provided to ESL students would allow students to better succeed academically.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Each of the students who participated in this research signed a faith-statement to enter the university they were currently attending at the time of this research. Future research done at a different type of institution may bring different results, as students may experience less community. Different results may also come from students from different faith or non-religious backgrounds. Additionally, future research done in more specific sub-groups would focus the research to better benefit specific student populations. For example, research done with country- or culture-specific participants would better explain how to support specific populations of students. The final implication for future research is a longitudinal study of students from the beginning to the end of their higher education experience to understand the stages of culture shock and acculturation affecting the themes explored above.

### **Limitations**

While the quantitative data of the research included 27 participants, the qualitative phenomenological interviews only included four participants. All of the students who participated were currently enrolled in a small, faith-based liberal arts institution in the Midwestern United States. The institution the participants attended at the time required faith statement for students to be admitted; therefore, these students identified with the Christian faith. The small size of this institution may also have played a unique role in this research, specifically socially. Social support systems, such as student friendship



networks, may not have the opportunity to be as beneficial in a small population of international students because the inner tier of students from a similar culture may not have been an option.

## **Conclusion**

This research sought to understand the experience of international students in the United States based on their self-perception of perseverance. The survey presented a grit score that showed a self-perception of perseverance slightly higher than average. To understand better how their perseverance played a role in their everyday lives, phenomenological interviews followed. This research revealed an essence of perception of situation, self, and external support leading to perseverance. Student perseverance is a result of internal and external supports and motivations shown through the following themes: ability to gain context, view of self, cultural experiences, social factors, and academic adjustment. Most participants showed a generally positive attitude toward overcoming challenges and adjusting to U.S. culture. This research can assist higher education professionals by recommending students' development of grit and providing social support structures, opportunities for communal spiritual development, faculty training, and academic language support. Establishing additional resources based on structures students already use can lead to more success in the international student population.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Why did you choose to study in the United States?
2. Why did you choose your major and how long have you known you've wanted to study this?
3. Describe how you overcame challenges and setbacks during your first year at Taylor.
4. Why did you chose to return to Taylor after your first year and what are strategies that you use to continue to move forward?
5. Describe ways you had to adjust to the classroom culture at Taylor.
6. Think about a task it took you a long time to work on. Were you able to finish it? What prompted you to finish? Are you proud of the work you did?
7. Think back to the survey question "I am a hard worker." What does it mean to you to be a hard worker? What was your answer to the survey question and what prompted you to mark the answer you did?
8. Do you set goals for yourself? If so, describe how you achieve them.
9. What is your definition of passion?
10. What is your definition of perseverance?
11. Describe the process of applying and obtaining the proper documentation to study at Taylor. How did this process encourage or discourage your mindset when you entered Taylor?

## **Appendix B**

### **Survey Informed Consent**

#### **TAYLOR UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT**

##### **How do international students view their ability to persevere?**

You are invited to participate in a research study on the perseverance of international students. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an international student at Taylor University who has proficient English Language abilities and have completed at least one academic year in the United States. The study is being conducted by Jana Soto, a Taylor University MAHE graduate student. It is under the supervision of Scott Gaier.

##### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of international students in an effort to understand how to improve services.

##### **Number of People Taking Part in the Research**

If you agree to participate, you will be one of approximately 100 participants.

##### **Procedures for the Research**

If you agree to participate in the research, you will do the following things:

- Complete a 10 question survey asking your views of your perseverance
- Have the opportunity to participate in follow-up interviews

The survey online will ensure participant confidentiality. The survey will be open approximately two weeks during the January Term.

##### **Risks of Participating in the Research**

There are no known risks in participating in the research except what students would experience in a normal day. Taylor University's Office of Intercultural Programs is available for students wishing for support.

##### **Benefits of Participating in the Research**

The benefits to participation that are reasonable to expect are clarifying what type of approach to international student services is beneficial—if so, considerations of what



services are most beneficial will follow. Moreover, this research will attempt to be a foundation for further research about whether international student services are more beneficial when stemming from what students are lacking or from recognizing previously established strengths of these students and building services around that.

**Alternative to Participating in the Research**

You have the option to not participate in this study.

**Confidentiality**

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Taylor University Institutional Review Board or its designees, the study sponsor, Scott Gaier, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

**Costs**

Taking part in this research will not result in any additional costs.

**Payment**

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

**Contact for Questions or Problems**

For questions, contact the researcher, Jana Soto, at [jana\\_soto@taylor.edu](mailto:jana_soto@taylor.edu). Scott Gaier can be reached at [scgaier@tayloru.edu](mailto:scgaier@tayloru.edu) or (765) 998-5391. Susan Gavin, chair of the institutional review board, may be reached at 756-998-5188 or [ssgavin@taylor.edu](mailto:ssgavin@taylor.edu).

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Jana Soto, Scott Gaier, or Taylor University.

**Participant's Consent**

By selecting next below you are confirming that you have read and agree with the information included in this consent form as well as to being 18 years of age or older.

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Informed Consent**

#### **TAYLOR UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT**

##### **Perception of Perseverance: How do international students view their ability to persevere?**

You are invited to participate in a research study of the perseverance of international students. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an international student at Taylor University who has proficient English Language abilities and have completed at least one academic year in the United States. The study is being conducted by Jana Soto, a Taylor University MAHE graduate student. It is under the supervision of Scott Gaier.

##### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of international students in an effort to understand how to improve services for students.

##### **Number of People Taking Part in the Research**

If you agree to participate, you will be one of approximately 5 subjects who will be participating in interviews.

##### **Procedures for the Research**

If you agree to participate in the research, you will do the following things:  
Having already completed the accompanying survey and being invited to participate further, you participate in a recorded hour-long interview.

The survey will be taken online to ensure participant confidentiality. Interviews will be conducted on Taylor's campus with only the researcher and the participant present. The interviews will be audio taped for the researcher to recall answers to the questions during the coding and theming. Interviews will take place during the spring semester, participants will be contacted about interviews at the beginning of the spring semester. During the time between surveys and interviews, no action needs to be taken by participants.

**Risks of Participating in the Research**

There are no known risks in participating in the research except what students would experience in a normal day. Taylor University's Office of Intercultural Programs is available for students wishing for support.

**Benefits of Participating in the Research**

The benefits to participation that are reasonable to expect are clarifying if what type of approach to international student services is beneficial—if so, considerations of what services are most beneficial will follow. Moreover, this research will attempt to be a foundation for further research about whether international student services are more beneficial when stemming from that students are lacking or from recognizing previously established strengths of these students and building services around that.

**Alternative to Participating in the Research**

Instead of being in the study, you have the option to not participate.

**Confidentiality**

Efforts will be made to keep your personal information confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Your identity will be held in confidence in reports in which the study may be published and databases in which results may be stored. Recordings of the interviews will only be accessed by the researcher and possibly the researcher's supervisor. These recordings will be destroyed upon completion of the research project in the spring of 2019.

Organizations that may inspect and/or copy your research records for quality assurance and data analysis include groups such as the study investigator and his/her research associates, the Taylor University Institutional Review Board or its designees, the study sponsor, Scott Gaier, and (as allowed by law) state or federal agencies, specifically the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) etc., who may need to access your research records.

**Costs**

Taking part in this research will not result in any additional costs.

**Payment**

You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

**Contact for Questions or Problems**

For questions about the study, contact the researcher, Jana Soto, at [jana\\_soto@taylor.edu](mailto:jana_soto@taylor.edu). Scott Gaier can be reached at [scgaier@tayloru.edu](mailto:scgaier@tayloru.edu) or (765) 998-5391. Susan Gavin, chair of the institutional review board, may be reached at 756-998-5188 or [ssgavin@taylor.edu](mailto:ssgavin@taylor.edu).

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your current or future relations with Jana Soto, Scott Gaier, or Taylor University.

**Participant's Consent**

By consenting to participate in interviews, you stating that you are 18 years of age or over.

By signing below you indicate that you agree to the conditions above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

